Women are permitted to visit relatives, neighbours and friends on their own within the city or town. If they travel to locations outside the city they should be accompanied by *'mahram'*, a close male relative such as their husband, son, father or brother. This is not always due to male restrictions, some women are inexperienced and frightened to travel on their own.

"When I know the way I travel or go alone or with female company, but if I don't [know the way] I need male company" (Khadija, Haz 1)

"Access to health in a village is not easy because there is no hospital. So if a woman from a village travels to a city or district how can she go alone because a village woman does not know the way and they don't have the courage to travel alone." (Halima, Sar 4)

In Grishk women are permitted by the Taliban to shop on their own, interact with shopkeepers and move around the town visiting women in other compounds, provided they wear the *burqa*. Even so the Taliban interfere, as Shahgul explains:

"It was easy to move around before. Nobody asked where you were going but the Taliban interfere with everything." (Gri 1)

Despite the Taliban influence, in many cases it is still age, individual families and/or economic necessity that determine how much room for manoeuvre a woman has. 18 year old Shafiqa (Gri 15) explains that her mobility depends on her husband's mood. Being young doesn't help either, she adds. Torpakey (Gri 10) is not allowed outside of her compound, even to visit relatives without her husband. Along the road between Grishk and Hazarjuft some women were wearing only a chadar while at work in the fields. One woman in Nad-i-Ali, whose family grows poppy, works in the fields with her husband.

The same restrictions do not apply to older women. As 70 year-old Bibigul explains:

"I use dupatta[15], but in the war and before the war I wore burqa. We are allowed to go out everywhere but only old women can go shopping otherwise there is no problem to get out. Not to the fields here but in the villages it is possible. I can go anywhere. I go to relatives houses, neighbours. ... I go to other districts like Grishk, Kandahar, Iran, Pakistan anytime I want. ... I can go alone inside the city but to Iran with a female and to Pakistan with a male. ... It was easier [to move around when I was younger] but it was not good in our culture to move alone but now I am old I can move alone. But young women can't travel alone from one village to another village but inside the city or village it is not a problem. ... It is because of the situation and also culture, but I don't know why they don't allow young women to do shopping. You can cross the bazaar but not do shopping." (Las 1)

This is echoed by 95 year old Rangina in Hazarjuft *"I'm too old. I'm not under Taliban policy"* (Haz 7) and 65 year old Hoor in Grishk : *"My life now it is OK. I'm too old and I'm not under the restriction of the Taliban. I hope that peace is lasting because I am tired of war."* (Gri 3)

This laxing of the rules for older women was also expressed by some women in the refugee villages who feel they will be able to work in the fields as well as do other labour

[15] Dupatta is an accessory of the shalwar kamiz (wide trousers and long tunic) and is usually made from silk, cotton or chiffon. In this context it is used to refer to a chadar, a large cotton, wool or thin polyester shawl.

work outside the home in Afghanistan, whereas others clearly state that any work they do will be restricted to their compound.

During the war women had relative freedom but no security, now Afghan women in the South have security but face restrictions - a point mentioned by many of the interviewed women. The restrictions, however, as two women remind do not just affect women they cause problems for men too.

"[The Taliban have placed] *restrictions. They are problems but not only for women, also for men."* (Bibi Ayesha, Sar 5)

"Negative changes are war, no education and too many restrictions for all men and women." (Marzia, Gri 12)

An important point of focus is the fact that life has changed little for many women under Talib restrictions. Before the war Bibi Amina points out:

"Our men were like the Taliban but that time there was no problem from government". (Sur 6)

"I know Taliban put some rules but before we had the same life. Only the direction of instruction has changed" (Bibigula, Haz 4)

"The situation is very bad. Everybody says no rights for women, but even before the war we had the same condition for women in the village. [What is] different from before is that restrictions are for women in the cities too." (Nadira, Sar 10)

"Of course life is sometimes difficult but no different for us. The problems are only for educated women and women who have no male company [widows] or women who want to work and get education. ... We are comfortable with this life, no difference for us. Talib is no problem for us." (Bibi Hawa, Sar 6)

Echoing the above, one woman told Dr. Yasmin not to *"worry about us. We had the same restrictions before. Worry about yourself, Kabuli woman. You cannot work."*

7. Women's Activities

Women gather together for a number of activities and celebrations. Weddings, funerals, circumcisions, Eids and birthdays are the formal activities during which women interact. In addition much informal visiting takes place between women in all the research areas. When together, they talk, sing, dance, tell stories, cry, encourage and assure one another, backstab, especially their daughter-in-laws (Sakina, Gri 4) and recite the Quran. *Talaw-e-Quran*, group recitations out loud, is most common when condoling the loss of a family member. Silent reading of the Quran, *Khatme Quran*, can also be done in a group. Women also get together for doing household work. They clean, cook and eat together, help each other to organise parties or to make up the bride. Sewing clothes together is also common and in Lashkargah and Surkhab women wash clothes together. The village Basic Health Unit (BHU) is an important meeting place for women living in the refugee villages.

Children are an integral part in women's networking. *"Children are our right hand"* says Rangina (Haz 7). All of the interviewed women said that they use children as

messengers, not only to other women and relations, but also to their husbands. As young children and boys often have few restrictions on their mobility and visibility, they can be important sources of information for women.

8. Women's Access to Health Care

The access to health care has always been poor in the rural areas of Helmand province. In Hazarjuft there is a trained nurse who is approached if home remedies do not work. For the services of a doctor people travel to Lashkargah. Women are anxiously awaiting the opening of the MCI hospital, that is being rehabilitated. In Grishk the sick are taken to see a private doctor or to the hospital in the town, more serious cases are referred to Kandahar, Kabul or Pakistan. Lashkargah has private clinics and hospitals but in some cases people travel for medical care to Kandahar, Kabul or Pakistan.

All women interviewed complain that there is a lack of medicines in Afghanistan. Training in health care and prevention of diseases is mentioned by 20 women as something they would like to receive training in. Women are aware of birth control and diseases such as AIDS. This is largely due to BBC radio. However, despite awareness, they are often unable to act due to the unavailability of contraception or pressure from their husbands or older family members. One 26 year old woman in Lashkargah told of her efforts to not get pregnant after having had two children and after her husband moved out to begin a relationship with another woman. Her denying intercourse only resulted in beating. She is now expecting her third child and lives alone with her in-laws.

In Baluchistan the UNHCR funded village Basic Health Units (BHU) have raised the awareness of the value of health care. There are 3 MCI run BHUs in Pir Alizei and Surkhab, one in Old Saranan and one in New Saranan. Female and male health and community development committees have been formed. They are entirely made up of local members of the community. They meet at the BHU to be taught by MCI staff about health care, education and community development. Each month they get together with the community development coordinator to give their feedback and tell her what they have done in their communities to pass on what they have learnt.

In the May 1998 committee meeting one woman told how she had persuaded women in her neighbourhood to come for family planning, and was acting as a 'middle man' for women wanting to sell embroidery. One woman had found a job for a widow and her two disabled sons, as household servants, in a wealthy Achekzai family in Quetta. The family are paying for rehabilitation for the woman's sons. She urged others to tell her of their skills so she could help. A third committee member had persuaded her husband and two other men to stop using snuff and five men to stop smoking cigarettes. Due to the joint efforts of two committee members three men had stopped heroin smuggling and using drugs. One of the heroin smugglers was now buying cotton for women to spin. 50 women are now involved in this business.

BHUs have provided many women with easier access to health care facilities than they had in Afghanistan prior to or during the war. In Afghanistan during illness or in an emergency women had to travel far. When the war began it was impossible to make the

long journey to a hospital due to fighting. It is further complicated by the fact that not all women can travel between towns, unless accompanied by a close male relative (husband/ brother/ father/ son). There is still great need for more female doctors as some women are unwilling, or restricted by male members of the family or the Taliban, to see a male doctor. Though there is now security in southern Afghanistan, distances to travel to see a doctor can still be long.

In the refugee village Surkhab the Taliban have established the Taliban centre and have visited BHUs to check that women were treated only by female doctors. They have begun to put some pressure on the BHUs to be closed down. They themselves have no intentions or capacity to provide alternative health care for the village. The community is concerned and angered. Asked what the Talib do when their women get sick, women answered that they are put in a pickup and taken to Quetta for treatment. The rest of the population do not have access to such services.

9. Women's Access to Education

"The restrictions are not only the Taliban. Who makes the government? Of course society. Who is society? Of course community. So our society does not prefer education for women, only in cities people want female education. Even if we shout that we want to get education, we can't get it. We should realise we are living in male-dominated society." (Negora, Sar 13)

All the women interviewed in Pir Alizei, Saranan, Surkhab and Nad-i-Ali were illiterate. In Hazarjuft one woman had had secondary school education the rest were illiterate, never having attended formal or informal education. In Lashkargah 3 women had had between 6-10 years of formal education. In Grishk one woman had finished school in the 8th grade, 3 women were college graduates. Two of them had qualified as teachers. One woman, the wife of a Talib, had been to *Madrassa,* Quranic classes, taught by her husband. She stated that she no longer believed in the benefits of female education.

One women mentioned that prior to the war education and health care facilities concentrated in the big cities, such as Kabul, Ghazni, Mazar, Herat and Kandahar.

"I think women in Kabul wanted to be educated, they need education for earning money too. We had lands and we were unaware of the value of education." (Belqisa, Sur 4)

Life as refugees and BBC radio have taught women the importance of education. Women explain that during the pre-war era, culture, tradition and childhood influence prohibited interest in and understanding of the value of health and education.

"Before war education was free and allowed but we, because of culture, did not want to study." (Totia, Sur 1)

"[Before the war there was] access but we did not want to be educated. We were thinking that education is not good for women but now we know it is necessary. [During the war] there was no access to education in the villages. [Now] there is no access to education but at this stage we want our basic needs." (Monawar, Sur 5)

During the war access to education in many areas was virtually impossible due to fighting and the mobility of the refugee population. Presently, education is not considered a

priority, as stated above by Monawar. Women stress the importance of education and express interest in it, but say that they need and want access to basic needs first. After that, it is time to think of education. As Bibi Ayesha says, *"When there is peace we will think of education."* (Sar 2)

In the refugee villages women have sent their daughters to school due to incentives, such as the Save the Children (US) handing out edible oil for those who send their girls to school. As Negora explains:

"Primary education is allowed for girls. But you have to know , here [in Pakistan, women] don't have restrictions and women know the value of education but our men don't allow us. Just because of some incentives our daughters go to school." (Sar 6)

In May 1998 in Surkhab, one refugee village, the Taliban threatened to cut the hands off of any parents who send daughters over 10 years old to school. This has caused outrage particularly among women. They ask how are they going to educate their daughters now. Slama Bibi, a community health committee member, feels that it is not only the Taliban that are to blame:

"Of course, girls and women are not allowed to get education, but we can't blame only the Taliban. Before the people in villages did not want to get education because of culture or tradition. I don't know. But now we know that everyone has to get education. Education is necessary for survival." (Sur 3)

In Afghanistan the Taliban are allowing primary education for girls in segregated schools in the south. The governor of Kandahar explains:

"When we took over, the 'house' was a mess. It was necessary to take strict measures to bring our house into order. Once the 'house' is in order, one can then start to develop things and relax."

This relaxing is becoming apparent but only in the south, in cities like Kandahar. Though some girl schools have started functioning, the objection to co-education still remains.

In Helmand province access to education is poor.

"Many changes during the war and life gets worse, violence, killing each other but then the Taliban came. Education is restricted but in villages we did not have education before for females. It does not make a difference for us" (Mahgula, Haz 2)

The children of five women in Hazarjuft had received some level of education. One woman had never sent her daughters to school, another woman's daughters had only attended school in Pakistan. Returnees from Pakistan, complain that their children's education came to a halt when they returned to Afghanistan either because there were no schools to attend, or because children had to enter the labour force.

"We don't have schools here. In the refugee village we asked for a school but when they decided to make a school we came back to Afghanistan." (Sharifa, Haz 6)

In Grishk two families had sent their children to school but they had not completed due to the war. One family's children had gone to Madrassa, one had completed college and

one secondary school. Two families educated only their sons: one through formal education the other in the *Madrassa.* Other women said they had not been able to send their offspring to school because of poverty and the security situation. Spozhmai (Gri 5), a qualified teacher, is secretly home schooling her children four hours a day.

In Lashkargah the children of 4 women had attended school but the girls had stopped when the Taliban forbid co-education. Boys are still attending school. One woman sent her daughters to *Madrassa* when their school was closed down by the Taliban. One son had completed college but his siblings had to work after primary school to supplement family income. Another young man completed eighth grade and then had to look for work as his mother was widowed. (See Annex III.)

Among the women in Helmand province there is interest in education. Education is equated with the possibility for children to lead a better life and to gain greater awareness of life.

"My childhood was very funny. We did not know about anything, now look at children. They know everything. When I got married I did not know what it meant. I thought that I'm a guest there. After one week I wanted to go back home. Now even a child of five knows." (Rangina, Haz 7)

Women themselves do not express a desire to learn how to read and write, but stress that it would be good if their children were given the opportunity. Some women lament at how different their life could have been had they had an opportunity to go to school.

"You know my sons are Talibs and I am in favour of education for both sexes. But look I am uneducated, I have not even asked my sons why they don't allow education for women." (Bibigula, Haz 4)

Lamenting, Bibigula shook her head, saying she would ask as soon as she saw her sons again.

For many, family restrictions were too great an obstacle to overcome. Khadija tells us:

"We didn't have a good childhood. The only [good] thing was peace. We could not get education or have a good life. We were from a poor family and my husband too. By passing of time I knew that education is a must for both sexes, but my father-in-law did not allow us to send our daughters to school. When he died the situation was changed. ... We can see positive and negative changes. As people living in the village we did not have value as human beings but now we are aware of everything. We did not know about TV but now our young children know about it... now we have different models of cars on the roads. But the negative is that our young generation can't get education. This is now desired. First we wanted peace. Now we have it. Before the Taliban women and girls were under sexual violence. We were powerless. Their language was the gun and killing people." (Haz 1)

Yet other's have a clear negative attitude towards female education.

"We women and girls, we are not allowed [to go to school]. It is not allowed in our society. Powerless women. But on the other hand it is good that we are at home and the husband, father and brothers earn money. Why should we waste our energy? Look at yourself [Dr. Yasmin] how you look tired and too far from your family. I think even at this stage you don't have security. This is because of education." (Basira, Haz 16)

10. Income Generating Activities

Female income generating activities within Afghanistan are predominantly centred around the compound. Women tend kitchen gardens or rear animals within the compound (see Annex IV). These products are mainly used for household subsistence but any excess is either sold or exchanged for other agricultural produce between neighbours or relatives. In Grishk women sell and exchange goods less than in the other research areas. Women say they could exchange goods but they can afford to buy them from the bazaar. One woman added that it is not good for 'city women' to deal with exchange. In Grishk exchange of goods takes place most often when the household receives unexpected guests.

In Lashkargah, Nad-i-Ali and particularly Hazarjuft dairy products, vegetables and chickens are exchanged and sold within the community. Animals such as chickens, ducks, sheep, goats, cows, donkeys, and rabbits are reared. Two women in Hazarjuft commented that they used to have rabbits but their men do not like rearing rabbits because they dirty the compound. 13 women do embroidery, one makes caps, 11 sew and sell clothes. Two women in Lashkargah make *leef*, a washing cloth, which they sell. Two women in Grishk bake bread for a wealthier household, while another washes clothes for others. One woman from Grishk travels to Pakistan to buy cosmetics and particularly hair removal cream, something she says men cannot buy for a woman. She has created a very successful business for herself.

Women in Surkhab are unanimous about being able to work outside and inside the home or compound on income generating activities. They state that due to poverty they must also work outside the home, even if they were to return to Afghanistan. This is one reason they are not repatriating. What they explain as working outside their compound, is selling or trading between households. Working in an office or similar, public environment would not be possible. It is not clear how much prior experience of income generating activities these women have, apart from embroidery and similar handicrafts. Vegetable growing has not been popular due to the insufficient water supply. Barring the problem with water women see no problem with growing vegetables in their compound. These women consider raising small animals in their courtyard to be a good idea, and would like to learn more about this possibility.

Women in Pir Alizei are involved in sewing and embroidery. Chickens are reared and only a few households have a goat or a sheep. Women know how to grow vegetables but cannot do so for even drinking water is a problem in the village.

Women in Saranan are involved in three major income generating activities: embroidery, stitching clothes and making kilims (a type of carpet). Not only do women weave but they are involved in all stages of kilim making starting from the spinning of wool. In Afghanistan they reared rabbits, goats and sheep. Some women in the refugee village still rear these animals though they don't have as many animals as they had in Afghanistan. Chickens can be reared but are considered more difficult and dirty and are thus less popular. Lack of water has been a problem for growing vegetables but there is a lot of interest in this.

11. Training

In Afghanistan women expressed the three main needs in their communities to be medicines, clothes and fruit. These needs reflect in the discussions on what women would like to learn more about. 20 women expressed interest in health care or the prevention of diseases. One woman mentioned nutrition. Training in home management skills was discussed by four women, handicrafts and sewing by two, child care by two, cooking and technical skills by one woman. One hopeful woman in Hazarjuft said she would like to learn about everything while a 38 year old in Lashkargah said she had learnt enough.

In the refugee villages women are interested in learning more about health care, kitchen gardens and rearing small animals in their compound. The idea of a roof garden, where creeper plants could be cultivated in an old broken water pot was mentioned to these women. It would provide insulation for the house in the summer and not need as much water, nor be as time consuming as a conventional garden. This idea received very much interest. Women expressed desire to receive training on how to set up such a garden. Spinach and beans were mentioned as possible plants. Soap making was also mentioned as a useful skill that training would be needed for.

Women in the refugee villages feel that for training to take place in Afghanistan it would have to be sanctioned by the government, the Taliban, and for some, their husbands. In the villages women feel that health training would be easier to carry out than the training of technical skills. Depending on the types of technical skills training given, women feel that it may be easier, in the present environment, to put to use health training than technical skills that they have acquired. Women inside Afghanistan feel that training would not be a problem as long as it was carried out by a female and held in a compound close to one's house.

Concern was also expressed by women that despite interest in training, they perhaps would not have time to participate in such activities with all other household duties.

"I have six children to take care of, I do other's house work and take care of in-laws. This is a lot of work for me. I don't have time but look my in-laws they will participate. They are interested. Everywhere they are looking for some training. When you entered our house, they were thinking you are talking of such training and they told me please write our name too." (Shafiqa, Las 4)

Some grandmothers, however, feel they are too old to take part in any training but encourage their daughters or daughters-in-law to participate.

12. Women's Sources of Information

Women's life history narratives demonstrate the many ways in which the communities, where these rural women live, have changed and how women themselves have become aware of their position and rights.

"Things have changed a lot: roads, television, airplane, cars... When I was a child we travelled on donkeys but now we travel in cars. Now I can hear from BBC radio that women are also part of society and they also have rights" (Gulaba, Haz 3)

"I never knew what politics was, now everybody talks about political issues and groups" (Rahmato, Haz 11).

"Women in the village had no value when we were children, we were unaware of our nature, who we are. When we got married we just worked like servants and gave birth, no rights. Before I think all women in the world are like me, but now I am aware that all women are not the same." (Roqia, Haz 9)

"Too much change. Everything is destroyed. Love gave its place to hate and fighting. Another change is that new machinery came: planes, cars, telephones in the villages TV .... people are becoming aware of their rights. They are not slaves anymore." (Hazrata, Haz 10)

Women's sources of information are predominantly BBC radio, their male relatives and other women that they meet. The BBC broadcasts programmes both in Pushto and Farsi twice a day. On Fridays there are three broadcasts. These broadcasts include news bulletins, educational dramas, health information, interviews, announcements, sports and answering letters of people looking for lost relatives. The Taliban have banned televisions and any other forms of entertainment, for example listening to instrumental music and love songs.

"We are not allowed to watch TV. They [Taliban] inspect so we sold it" (Shahgul, Gri 1)

Three women in the refugee villages mentioned relatives as important sources of information, another mentions letters. The Mullah was also mentioned as a source of information. Illiterate women, both refugees and those in Afghanistan, rely on verbal messages sent via children, their husbands or relatives. A significant centre for the circulation of information in refugee camps is the village BHU. Community health workers also act as important sources of information. Women pass on information and gossip about what they have heard, when they meet with each other at the BHU.

"Here we have BHU, with all staff, we have FCHWs [Female Community Health Workers] now, but we have in the camp or this village, the families of Taliban and they come sometimes here but they don't tell us anything. But inside Afghanistan we hear about [the situation] but I don't know how much of it is true, because we people from small things make very big things. This is the habit of us." (Delbar, Sar 7)

13. Repatriation

"We need respect as a woman and peace. We are tired of war, fighting. We want to go to our native land." (Qadermanda, Sar 8)

There is much desire to go back to Afghanistan but uncertainty of having a livelihood and gainful employment are two of the reasons that keep Afghans in Pakistan. The most frequent reasons stated by women in the refugee villages, for not returning to Afghanistan are the lack of work, difficulties for women to work outside the home alongside men, lack of land and the fact that everything in Afghanistan is expensive. The lack of central government, of rights and of peace were issues brought up particularly by women in Saranan. This reflects the fact that they are from the north where there is continued fighting and uncertainty.

In Pir Alizei many of those who repatriated have returned to Pakistan over the last year. Those who repatriated did not find a job in Afghanistan. In Pakistan they can at least find labour work mostly on farms, orchards or gardens. Family properties in Afghanistan have been devastated and without work people are unable to acquire the resources to rehabilitate their property. Particular concerns for women are the lack of health care facilities in Afghanistan. They say that at least in the refugee villages they can have a clean delivery with the help of a CHW and have access to transportation in the case of an emergency. In their villages in Afghanistan they have to rely on the services of the village *dai*, a traditional birth attendant.

The Taliban recruiting young men and adolescent boys to fight causes great concern for families on both sides of the border. This is currently one reason why people do not want to return. Women ask why they should take the risk of losing more family members in fighting when they have already lost sons, brothers and husbands in the war. In the south the Taliban have been either kidnapping adolescents, pressurising families to send their sons to fight or forcing them to give up their land if they are unwilling to do so.

Two mothers in Hazarjuft told us the following:

"My sons graduated from secondary school. They left it because of work or to attend the army for two years, then they came back to the village to hide themselves from the government." (Khadija, Haz 1)

"...We don't like fighting and the Taliban take our young boys for fighting. This is a big problem." (Sharifa, Haz 6)

One young boy managed a narrow escape from a truck taking youths to the north in a busy market place, only because he knew the driver.

14. Conclusions

The position of women in Afghanistan is a complex one. When addressing Afghan women's issues in the present environment, care must be taken not to generalise. It is important to distinguish between the rule of men and the rule of male values. Though patriarchy may be considered gender oppression it is also about power relations that are not always gender specific. Not all men dominate and not all women are subordinate. What is going on in Afghanistan is not just an attack against women. Men are also being oppressed. Not all Afghan men are Talib. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that all men in Afghanistan oppress all women.

Women have to negotiate their position within many systems and layers of power. Women have to negotiate their position within familial, cultural and political spheres. Family influence continues to be important in determining issues concerning mobility, education and access to health care. Moving beyond the social value system is difficult for women in a community where family and male honour is tied to women's behaviour. There is concern about what others will say. Khadija sums it up clearly.

1. Introduction

The emergence and advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan has brought to the forefront issues concerning the position of Afghan women. Numerous organisations, both the different United Nations organisations, most notably UNHCR, as well as NGOs such as CARE International, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA), Save the Children (US) and Mercy Corps International (MCI) have been attempting to assess how women can continue to be involved and benefit from development and aid, despite the restrictions put upon them. The most highly publicised effort to date has been the United Nations Interagency Gender Mission to Afghanistan in November 1997, and Angela King's subsequent report.

In any attempts to mainstream gender concerns in assistance efforts in Afghanistan, a voice needs to be given to local, female interpretations of the impacts of rights violations. Discursive spaces for the narratives of Afghan women need to be opened within development. Therefore, MCI has commenced qualitative research among Afghan women within the MCI project areas, both in southern Afghanistan and in refugee villages in Baluchistan, Pakistan. If women are to be involved in development and are to benefit from projects, more information is needed not only on the roles, needs, capabilities and perceptions of the women involved, but also on the ways in which these women exercise their agency. This means focusing on the ways women resist and comment on their lives in many, often very subtle ways.[1] For instance, during the war women wove designs of weapons and slogans into carpets.

Speaking of gender in Afghanistan is entering into a very complex web of cultural practices, ethnic relationships, different religious interpretations, issues of nationalism, class and economic status. In Afghanistan one cannot speak of unified gender relations. Discourses of gender and power have been historically constructed, for instance by war. The knowledge of sexual difference is socially and politically constructed and is present in institutions, such as *purdah*[2], and are particular to the cultural structures of a given area.

Gender in the context of this work is defined as the cultural and social interpretation and understanding of biological difference. It is a social and symbolic arena of ongoing contestation over specific identities, behaviours, rights, obligations, roles, responsibilities and sexualities (Butler 1990, Sedgwick 1990:27-28). 'Gender roles' are culturally specific differences between male and female 'gender'. 'Male' and 'female' can be valued differently, for instance, by according one gender more power than the other in particular contexts. Male and female gender roles are elastic and interlinked with one another. This research is concerned with gender, but it is not a gender survey, for no men were interviewed in the course of the research. However, a survey on women's position cannot be divorced from issues relating to both genders and different gender roles that are played out in a community.

---

[1] See the work of Kumar 1994, Mernissi 1995 or Doubleday 1988.
[2] Female seclusion and segregation of the sexes.

"We want to hear more about every thing but women are powerless, and we do according to society. We have a proverb : Eat what you want. Dress the way your community wants. If we do something which is restricted in our community the community will not like us." (Haz 1)

For rural and conservative urban women, the Taliban have been little more than one more layer of influence. Many women's lives have not been dramatically changed by the emergence of the Taliban. For some the restrictions on shopping in particular, can be borne because the Taliban have provided peace. According to one woman, some women in Kabul say that though wearing the veil is not ideal, compared to the peace that is being provided the inconvenience of the veil is small. Rural women were well acquainted with the veil, either in the form of the *burqa* or *chadar* prior to the Taliban.

This peace has enabled some families to repatriate. However, both in the rural areas of Afghanistan and now also in the refugee villages across the border in Pakistan, things have begun to change in the last months. The Taliban's need for more, young, male fighting power is a concern for families. Not only is the safety of their offspring at stake but they are in danger of losing lands if they do not cooperate with the Taliban. In some refugee villages, such as Surkhab, the Taliban are attempting to establish themselves as the authority. This is met with resistance and fear by the local population.

Within these layers of influence and power women are able to operate in a number of different ways. In all research areas women are permitted to move between the compounds of female friends and relatives. Older women are also permitted to shop and work in the fields outside the home. The Taliban are more strict in areas that were previously more liberal. Thus, of the research areas Lashkargah is faced with the strictest control of women.

Women's visits to neighbouring compounds are rarely purely social. These situations are used for circulating information, working together, celebrating or condoling and selling and exchanging goods between households. The goods that are predominantly exchanged or sold are agricultural products but clothes and cosmetics also circulate between households. Income generating activities such as spinning wool, embroidery and sewing are often done together with other women. Women do household work together or help in arranging celebrations such as weddings or Eids.

A focus on what women do and what activities they partake in reveals that there are many unused and potential opportunities for information dissemination and training. The village BHU arises as a significant space in women's communication networks and should be considered as a medium for possible information dissemination. In particular the waiting time to see a doctor or nurse could be utilised in this way.

Women in Afghanistan are eager to receive training, particularly in health care, for access to health facilities is still very difficult for many families. Women in the refugee villages benefit from BHUs and the health information circulated by female community health committee members. Because these village women do not have agricultural lands and suffer from water shortages they expressed an interest in kitchen, compound and roof gardens as well as the rearing of small animals. If any training is carried out it would have to be given by a woman and held either in a compound of someone's house or in

another space where women gather. Care must be taken not to significantly increase women's work load. Even if she has an income generating activity or takes part in training she will still have to do the majority of housework.

Before the war there was a lack of interest in and knowledge of the benefits of education as well as a lack of schools in rural Afghanistan. During the war access was barred by constant fighting. Now access to female education is difficult and not seen by many families as a top priority until basic needs are catered for. Families whose children went to school in Pakistan or in Afghanistan, prior to the Taliban closing schools or restricting girls from attending, complain that their children have been robbed of the opportunity for education.

As is clear from the narratives of the women interviewed, though the majority of the women are illiterate, they are not ignorant. Ironically, it seems that for rural women a contribution of the Taliban has been that they have realised their rights. With increased restrictions on female mobility and by banning TVs and other forms of entertainment the impact of radio has grown. BBC radio is mentioned as one of the main sources of information by women and learning about female rights is attributed in part to the BBC. The most important source of information remains word of mouth from male members of the family and women at the BHUs or women's gatherings.

There is a desire to repatriate, but economic difficulties, fighting in the North, and lack of land and the devastation of family properties in Afghanistan keeps people in refugee villages. The situation in the north is still confusing and violent. This reflects in the way women in Saranan speak of Afghanistan. They prioritise peace while Surkhabi women from the relatively peaceful south prioritise work.

This has been the first phase of ongoing qualitative research carried out by MCI in the areas that it works. In future, research will also be commenced in other areas of Afghanistan, prior to new MCI project work, to ascertain women's needs, restrictions and opportunities. In order to disseminate the information gathered, the analysis of the fieldwork, particularly interviews carried out in Afghanistan, is being shared with the Afghan women in the refugee villages. Educated local women within project areas have also been identified and will be trained to carry on research in the communities. Monitoring and analysis will be carried out from Quetta. All interviews and other research data is typed and filed. It is available to interested parties for research purposes at the MCI Pakistan/Afghanistan headquarters in Quetta, Pakistan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmed, Akbar S. (1976) *Millenium and Charisma Among Pathans. A Critical Essay in Social Anthropology.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ahmed, Leila (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam. Historical Roots of a Modern Debate.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Boesen, Inger W. (1983) Conflicts of Solidarity in Pakhtun Women's Lives. In Bo Utas (ed.) *Women in Islamic Societies. Social Attitudes and Historical Perspectives.* London: Curzon Press, Humanities Press.

Boesen, Inger W. (1988) What Happens to Honour in Exile? Continuity and Change Among Afghan Refugees. In Bo Huldt, Erland Jansson (eds.) *The Tragedy of Afghanistan. The Social, Cultural and Political Impact of the Soviet Invasion*. London: Croom Helm.

Butler, Judith (1990) *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* London: Routledge.

Donnan, Hastings (1988) *Marriage Among Muslims. Preference and Choice in Northern Pakistan*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Doubleday, Veronica (1988) *Three Women of Herat*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Dupree, Nancy Hatch (1989) *Seclusion or Service: Will Women Have a Role in the Future of Afghanistan?* New York: Occasional Paper No.29. The Afghanistan Forum.

Grima, Benedicte (1993) *The Performance of Emotion Among Paxtun Women. "The Misfortunes Which Have Befallen Me".* Karachi: Oxford University Press.

hooks, bell (1981) *Ain't I a Woman?* Boston: South End Press.

hooks, bell (1994) Postmodern Blackness. In Williams, Patrick; Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*. London: Harvester and Wheatsheaf.

Jayawardena, Kumari (1995) *The White Woman's Other Burden. Western Women and South Asia During British Rule*. London: Routledge.

Kumar, Nita (1994) Introduction. In Nita Kumar (ed.) *Women as Subjects. South Asian Histories*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Le Duc, Carol; Homa Sabri (1996) Room to Manoeuvre: Study on Women's Programming in Afghanistan. Islamabad: UNDP.

Mandelbaum, David G. (1988) *Women's Seclusion and Men's Honor. Sex Roles in North India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.* Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

Mernissi, Fatima (1987) *Beyond the Veil. Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society.* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Mernissi, Fatima (1995) *The Harem Within. Tales of a Moroccan Girlhood*. London: Bantam.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (1994) Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. In Williams, Patrick; Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory.* London: Harvester and Wheatsheaf.

Mumtaz, Khawar; Farida Shaheed (1987) *Women of Pakistan. Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* Lahore: Vanguard.

Nair, Janaki (1992) Uncovering the Zenana. Visions of Indian Womanhood in Englishwomen's Writings, 1813-1940. In Cheryl Johnson-Odim & Margaret Strobel (eds.) *Expanding the Boundaries of Women's History. Essays on Women in the Third World*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

The Holy Quran

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ul Haq Khan, Mazhar (1972) *Purdah and Polygamy. A Study in the Social Pathology of the Muslim Society*. Peshawar: Nashiran-e-Ilm-o-Taraqiyet.

ANNEX I

Interview formats

Village/Camp survey

Refugee village	Afghanistan
1. Why not going back to Afghanistan? <u>2. What do women think the situation in Afghanistan?:</u> **3. Access to health facilities:** a Now b Before Taliban c Before the War **4. Access to education facilities:** a Now b Before Taliban c Before the War **5. Influence of Taliban on daily life routine?** **6. Comfortable with this?** a. If not why/what? 7. What is needed to be comfortable with life in Afghanistan? 8. Can they work outside the house? If yes doing what. If not – why not? 9. Can they work at home on income generation activities? 10. Can they grow vegetables in their compound? (Carrots, peppers, cabbage, spinach, other) 11. Can they raise small animals in their compound? (chickens, rabbits, beas) 12. What is their view on training in ie: • Health, • Technical skills 13. Is it possible for them to be given training in ie: • health, • technical skills 14. How is it possible for them to be given training in ie: • health, • technical skills 15. What is the source of their information? How often do they get information from Afghanistan?	<u>1. What do women think of the situation in Afghanistan?</u> **2. Access to health facilities:** a Now b Before Taliban c Before the War **3. Access to education facilities?** a. Now b. Before Taliban c. Before the War **4. Influence of Taliban on daily life routine?** **5. Comfortable with this?** a. If not why/what? 6. What is needed to be comfortable with life in Afghanistan? Can they work at home on income generation activities (outside the house? Doing what? Why not? 7. Can they grow vegetables in their compound? (carrots, peppers, cabbage, spinach, olive, beans) 8. Can they raise small animals in their compound? (chickens, rabbits, bees) 9. What is their view on training in ie: • health, • technical skills 10. Is it possible for them to be given training in ie: • health, • technical skills 11. How is it possible for them to be given training in ie: • health, • technical skills 13. What would they like to learn to do? 14. What would they like to do? 15. What is the source of their information? (men? Who do they visit, who visits them? Radio, TV? Other) weddings, parties, mullah? 16 How often do they get information from Afghanistan?
Random surveys of 15 women in each of three refugee villages. Discussions with Health Committees	Yasmin

Survey of Afghan Women in MCI Programme Areas

Guidelines for Questions

The MCI survey focuses on Afghan women in refugee villages in Baluchistan and in rural communities in the Helmand and Kandahar provinces of Afghanistan. The following questions are suggestions on ways to find out about Afghan women's access to health care and education services as well as the extent of their general mobility in the community that they live. These questions also explore possible income generating activities, sources of information available to women and refugee women's perceptions of the present situation in Afghanistan.

It is not crucial to ask all interviewees all of these questions. The questions should be used as a guideline to help the researcher keep focus of the information that is needed by the project and the donor. These questions should trigger conversations about relevant issues but the interviewees should be able to bring forth concerns that may not be noted in these question. Any such concerns, anecdotes, stories or examples should also be recorded as valuable information. What is not said can be as important as what is said. Silences on the subjects introduced should be noted.

I recommend some of the survey be carried out as group interviews. The ways in which women agree or disagree with each other will give a fuller picture of how things are. A group interview should ideally include no more than 4-5 women (if possible) at one time otherwise writing notes becomes very complicated.

There is a need for comparative data on the situation before the war, during the war and now, during the Taliban. It may be better not to directly mention the Taliban in the questions until the women bring it up in conversation. Therefore, it may be useful to focus on women's life history narratives as these will show how things have changed. A life history narrative means asking the person to talk about his/her life. Below I give some questions on how to guide such an interview. For these interviews it is important to have women of different ages but life history narrative interviews should focus on the older women. For information on the state of pre-war health-care and education women who had given birth at least once before the war should be targeted.

Some questions focus on purdah. These will reveal the general mobility of women in their community and how restrictions on women have either laxed or become stricter. It is a recognised fact that in exile purdah restrictions often become stricter because it functions as the protection and defense of a family in an environment that is alien and often considered more dangerous than home. It demonstrates the agnatic (male line) family's social and ethnic identity, in a situation where the men cannot demonstrate this through economic and social autonomy.

Anna M. Pont
Social Development Advisor.
March 1998

Survey Questions

* = question applicable to refugee villages only.

I Life History Narratives:

1. Where were you born and brought up?

2. Tell me about your childhood, how was life then?

3. How did things change as you grew older?

4. When were you married?

5. Did you give birth soon after the marriage? How were things then?

6. How have things changed as your children have grown older? Is their childhood different from yours? How?

7. How was life during the war?

8. * When and why did you leave Afghanistan?

9. * Do you want to return? Why? Why Not? Why did you return?

10. Tell me about your life now.

II Donor / MCI: Women's Access to Education and Health Care

General Mobility and Access to Services.

1. Are you allowed to go out of the house/compound/village for shopping/bazaar or to visit friends or work in the fields/elsewhere? When and where do you go if you leave the house?

2. Do you travel outside the village/town to visit relatives/attend weddings/other celebrations? Where do you travel to?

3. Do you go alone/ with other women/male relatives?

4. Was it easier to move around when you were younger or now.

5. Is that because of the situation in the /village/country or because purdah has become more/ less strict?

6. How do/did you do purdah in Afghanistan (before the war, during the war), how do you do it now? Why?

Health Care.

7. When you, your child or a relative is sick what do you do?

8. Where do you go for help? How is it?

9. Do you have to travel further now than before for medical help?

10. Have you given birth? Where?

11. * Tell me was it different to give birth in Afghanistan than in the refugee village? Why? Different before the war and after, different during the war and now?

Education.

12. Have you gone to school? Where? What level?

13. Do your children go to school? Why? Why not?

14. Do/Did your brothers/husband go to school?

15. Do you go to Quranic classes? Who is teaching you there? What is taught? How often? How many women are there? Do young girls also go? Can you take your children there too?

16. How did you learn, or who taught you, to do housework and take care of children?

III Donor / MCI Income Generating Activities for Women.

1. Do you do any income generating activities? (Embroidery, sewing clothes, buying and selling cosmetics, creams, jewelry, cloth?)

2. Do husbands bring items for sale from Afghanistan/Pakistan? What items?

3. What would you like to learn to do? What would be useful for you to know how to do?

4. What kinds of things could you sell or exchange with others in your community?

5. What would you need that is not available in your community?

6. Are there markets/bazaars close to you where you could buy and sell things?

7. What could you do in the house or outside?

8. Could you grow vegetables (carrots, cabbage, peppers, spinach, okra, beans, onions, tomatoes, melons) in the house/garden on the roof?

9. Could you rear small animals (chickens, rabbits, bees, goats)?

10. If you grew vegetables or reared animals could you sell your produce somewhere? Could your children or husbands sell for you?

11. If training was available in the things you are interested in (health, technical skills etc.) would/could you participate. If not, why?

12. If training in health and technical skills was given to you and other women in the community where would be a good place for it to take place? Someone's home? Clinic? Outside in a compound?

IV Donor / MCI: Women's Sources of Information

1. Who do you talk to? How often? Who don't you talk to? Why?

2. Do women get together often? For what occasions?

3. What kinds of things do you do together with other women? with your family?

4. Do you send children with messages to your neighbours or husbands?

5. Do you watch TV or listen to radio?

6. Who do you visit, why, when, how often. Do you travel far?

7. Does your husband/son/brother/father or in-laws travel much? Into Afghanistan/ In Pakistan? Do they tell you about their travels? What do they tell you?

8. Do you have relatives in other countries or elsewhere in Afghanistan/Pakistan? Are you in touch with them?

9. How do you keep in touch with relatives and friends in Afghanistan/Pakistan/elsewhere?

10. Are there many aid organisations/health clinics/community development people working in the community? Is your husband involved? How? Are you involved? How? Are you benefiting? How?

In the context of this work care must be taken in the use of 'women' as a category of analysis. Much of western feminist discourse defines the third world woman as the powerless victim of particular cultural and socio-economic systems.[3] It homogenises women. Women are reduced to victims of the colonial process, of male violence, of familial systems, of the economic development process and of religious ideologies.[4]

This study attempts to show the complexity of the position of Afghan women. The research is concerned with female mobility, access to education and health care, women's activities, income generation, training needs, women's sources of information and repatriation. By focusing on the above mentioned issues, we can see that women's position under the present regime is not uniform. It has never been uniform during previous regimes, during or before the war.

There is a continued need to investigate Afghan women's participation in development and include historical and cultural analysis in the efforts to understand the impact of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Questions need to be raised as to the degree to which the Taliban can be held responsible for all restrictions and violations of women's rights. A focus on some historical facts and Pushtoon cultural practices, reveals that under the Taliban, many rural women's lives have actually changed little. Many restrictions on female mobility, visibility and participation precede the emergence of the Taliban. The Taliban have taken religious and traditional, Pushtoon, practices to the extreme and in doing so also placed restrictions on educated women accustomed to working outside the home. For these women life has changed a great deal.

As well as a brief focus on Pushtoon cultural systems, *purdah*, the seclusion of women and the segregation of sexes, needs to be investigated. *Purdah* originally evolved as a means to control women of the dominant feudal or tribal groups. Currently it is practiced to a lesser or greater degree in the Muslim world according to individual or family practices, age, class, area of inhabitance, ethnicity, economic and social status and the influence of religious and political powers. (Mumtaz et al. 1987: 29-31.) It is an element of daily life that effects social life as well as economic, political, matrimonial and educational issues (Ul Haq Khan 1972). The fact that Afghan women are not militant and are now faced with many restrictions on their visibility and mobility, does not mean they are doing nothing, or would not like to do more, to change their lives and those of future generations. The 'veil' should not be considered an impermeable wall behind which there is no possibility for action. Instead, use should be made of existing female networks in private spaces.

2. Pushtoonwali and Purdah

As an ethnic group the Pushtoon[5] are spread across the Southeastern parts of Afghanistan, the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan and the tribal areas along the border between the two countries. The 25 million Pushtoon are made up of

[3] For critique on western feminist discourse see: Mohanty 1994, Jayawardena 1995, hooks 1981, 1994.
[4] See Mohanty (ibid.)
[5] Also known as Pukhtun in the Central and North of Afghanistan and Pakistan, or Pathan: the name given by the British.

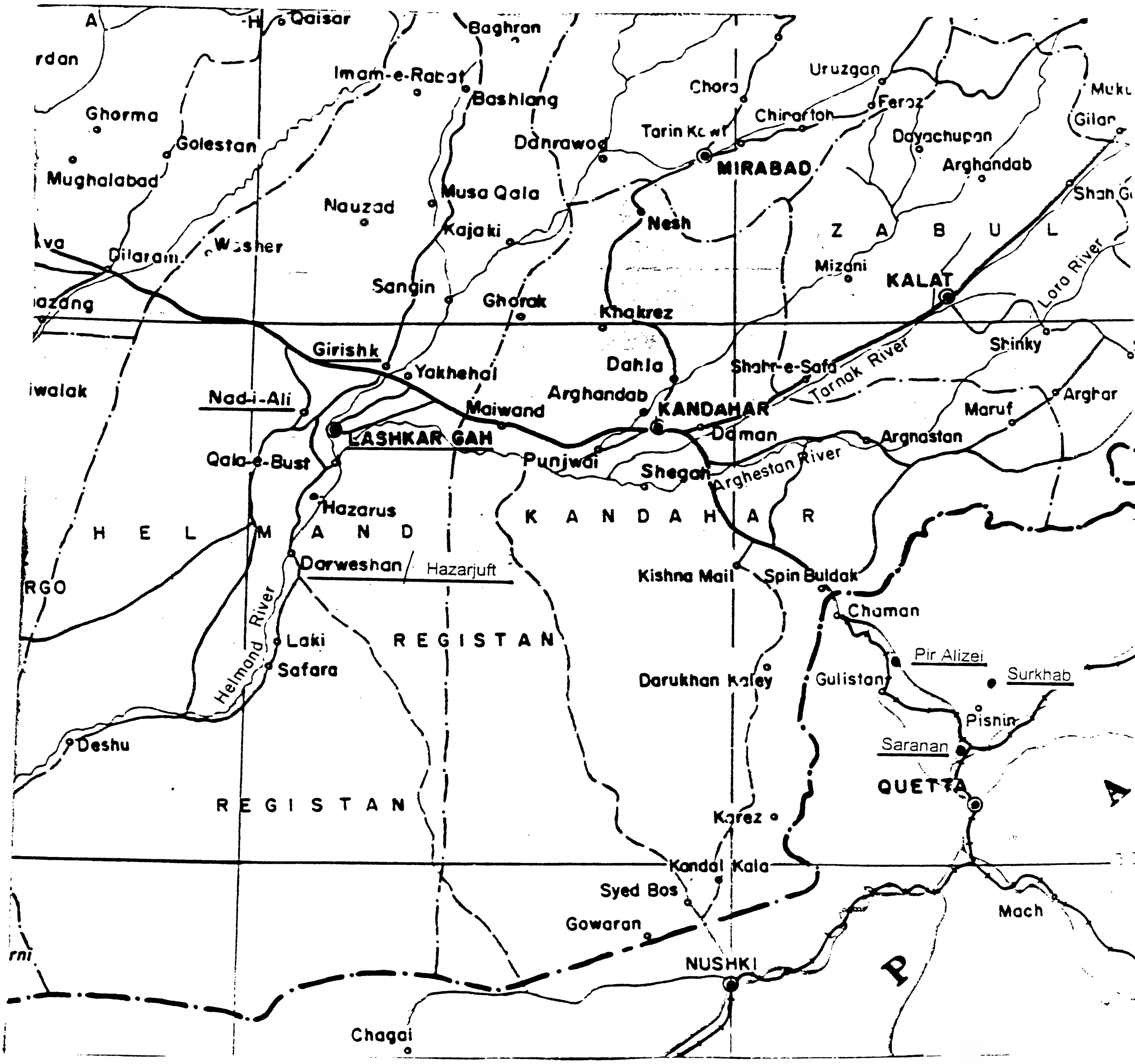
V *Donor / MCI Why Do Afghan Return or do not Return to Afghanistan?

1. What do you think of the situation in Afghanistan at the moment?
2. Do you want to move back to Afghanistan? Why? Why not?
3. Have some of your family members already moved back?
4. Your husband live in Afghanistan?
5. What would make your family decide to move back to Afghanistan?
6. What keeps you in Pakistan?
7. Do you know of people who have gone back to Afghanistan and then decided to come back to Pakistan again?
8. If you move back will the whole family go back or just the men/women?
9. How would you go back?
10. Would you go back to your original village/city or live somewhere else in Afghanistan?

ANNEX II

Map of Research Areas





Locations of refugee villages is approximate.

ANNEX III

Details of Interviewees in Afghanistan

HAZARJUFT

Age	Marriage Age	Education	Husband's Education	Children's Education	Returnee from Pakistan
42	12	-	-	Sons: secondary Daughters: none	-
45	20	-	-	-	-
48	13 (Widow)	-	-	-	-
55	15	-	-	In Pakistan	yes
45	23	-	Teacher	Pre war	-
30	20	-	Secondary	-	yes
95	15 (Widow)	-	University	Incomplete	yes
35	15 (Separated)	-	University	No children	yes
38	23	-	College	Daughters: in Pakistan	yes
55	20	-	-	In Pakistan secondary	yes
35	26	-	-	-	-
15	Unmarried	-		No children	yes
25	22	Secondary	College	Too young	-
20	10	-	Primary	-	-
17	Unmarried	-		No children	yes
19	Unmarried	-		No children	yes

LASHKARGAH

Age	Marriage Age	Education	Husband's Education	Children's Education	Returnee from Pakistan
70	20	-	-	1 son college	-
26	13	7 years	College	School until Taliban, now Madrassa	-
45	12 (Widow)	-	Secondary	8 years	-
35	18	-	College	Sons: yes Daughters: before Taliban	-
60	20	-	-	-	-
35	19 (Widow)	10 years	College	-	-
25	18	6 years	Army Institute graduate	-	-
38	22	-	-	-	-

NAD-I-ALI

Age	Marriage Age	Education	Husband's Education	Children's Education	Returnee from Pakistan
38	18	-	literate	-	-
70	14	-	-	-	-
38	unmarried	-			-

GRISHK

Age	Marriage Age	Education	Husband's Education	Children's Education	Returnee from Pakistan
52	19	-	Educated	Incomplete	-
38 (Disabled)	28	Teacher	Educated	Madrassa	-
65	15	-	Secondary	Up to 9th	-
60	14	-	-	-	-
40	24	Teacher	College	Home schooled	-
56	16	-	-	-	-
40	29	-	-	-	-
40	19	Mardrassa	Madrassa	Sons:Madrassa	-
60	20 (Widow)	-	-	-	-
40	16 (Widow)	8 years	College	Son: yes Daughters: none	-
32	26	-	-	-	-
50	15	-	College	Secondary	-
65	20 (Widow)	-	Literate	College	-
32	16	-	-	-	-
30	25	College	Literate	Too young	-
18	15	-	Literate	Too young	-

ANNEX IV

Goods Produced, Sold and Exchanged in Helmand Province

GOODS PRODUCED, SOLD AND EXCHANGED IN HELMAND PROVINCE

The numbers in the table indicate the number of women who produce a product, rear an animal or are involved in another income generating activity. 'Sell/exchange' refers to women selling or exchanging a particular product within their community.

Product	Lashkargah	Hazarjuft	Grishk	Nad-i-Ali
Eggs	sell/exchange	sell/exchange	sell/exchange	3
Milk	sell/exchange	sell/exchange	sell/exchange	3
Yogurt		sell/exchange	sell/exchange	
Vegetables	sell/exchange	sell/exchange	sell/exchange	3
Cucumber		sell/exchange	3	
Spinach	2	5	3	2
Turnips		4	1	2
Wheat		2		2
Poppy		1		2
Okra		3	2	
Onions	3	7	7	2
Garlic	1			
Chilies	2	1	2	
Cauliflower		2		1
Mint	2	1	4	
Pumpkin		1		
Carrots		1		
Beans				1
Tomato	2	1	1	2
Donkey		3		
Cow		9	10	1
Chicken	5	11	9 sell/exchange	3 sell/exchange
Ducks	2		1 sell	1
Sheep	1	5	4	2
Rabbits		2		
Goats		4		3
Clothes	4	4	4 sell/exchange	1
Caps	1, sell			
Embroidery	sell/exchange	8	4	1
Leef (wash cloth)	3, sell			
Cosmetics			sell/exchange	
Bread			2	
Medicines		sell/exchange		

approximately 50 different tribes, the most famous of which are the Durranis, Afridis, Khattaks and Waziris. The Pushtoon on both sides of the border have three fundamental elements in common: language, religion and the Pushtoon cultural system known as the *Pushtoonwali* or *pukhtu*. Some Pushtoons living in the tribal areas, however, do not consider many of the urban Pushtoons to be "real Pushtoons" because they do not adhere as strictly to Pushtoon cultural practices.

Islam constitutes a spiritual and worldly way of life. The Pushtoon, regardless of nationality, consider each other brothers in faith to whom hospitality and help is owed. The war against the communist government and the Soviet invasion was considered to be a holy war, *jihad*. Despite some local variations the Pushto language is spoken by all Pushtoon. The family household is the primary social, economic and political frame of Pushtoon life and the unit of production and management. Households are patrilineal and patrilocal[6] and are also considered the fundamental unit of solidarity and cooperation.

Pushtoonwali is based on such core values as honour and modesty. Hospitality and blood revenge are other crucial aspects of 'having' or 'doing' *pukhtu*. Hospitality and refuge must be granted to anyone who seeks it. People compete for the reputation of being hospitable. *Badal*, blood revenge, is central to understanding most action and interaction within Pushtoon society; it is an honourable act to kill someone who has killed one's relative. This complex system of morality and law of honour define the individual and the space they are accorded in society. Women are closely guarded and secluded as carriers of family and male honour. (Ahmed 1976, Boesen 1983, 1988, Grima 1993: 2-6.)

There is a reciprocal relation between *purdah,* the seclusion of women and the segregation of the sexes, and *izzat*, male and family honour. The institution of *purdah* demarcates boundaries in the context of gender and mobility. These boundaries can be divided into boundaries of physical space and boundaries created by dress and behavior. Restrictions on women's freedom are important because the Pushtoon form a society where men expect to find a virgin bride. Women's seclusion is strictest during adolescence. Family honour is maintained and enhanced through a daughter's marriage, after which a woman is guarded by her husband, affines[7] and particularly her mother-in-law. After giving birth to children, restrictions on her movements begin to relax. A woman is least tied down by *purdah* restrictions after menopause, her "loss of sexuality".[8] (Donnan 1988: 87-110, Mandelbaum 1988: 70, 82-83.)

A woman's virtue is linked with maintaining the Muslim social order in tact. Seclusion is a way of protecting both men and women from each other and their innate natures;

---

[6] Decent is traced through the male members of the family and upon marriage women leave their families to reside with their husband's family.

[7] Relations by marriage.

[8] The Quran recognises this change in a woman's status the following way: *"Such elderly women as are past the prospect of marriage, there is no blame on them if they lay aside their outer garments, provided they make not a wanton display of their beauty: but it is best for them to be modest[.]"* (Quran 24: 60.)

instincts.[9] It reaffirms the social order of the family and the hierarchy of the social world outside the home. 'Showing respect' to men by abiding by these observances is about keeping women in a subordinate place, because, as wives, daughters and sisters, women hold the dangerous position of being able to disrupt bonds between men, the harmony of the household and ultimately of the whole community. In some cases it has become a way of keeping women dependent on male relatives and been used to deny women access to economic, social and political power. (Mandelbaum 1988: 18, 63-64, 72-75.)

In exile the practice of *purdah* often initially becomes stricter. It functions as the protection and defense of the family in an environment that is alien and considered more dangerous than home. It demonstrates the agnatic[10] family's social and ethnic identity, in a situation where the male Pushtoon cannot demonstrate this through economic and social autonomy. (Boesen 1988: 236-37.) However, when men are unable to find work their insistence on purdah becomes less rigid. As one woman put it, *"When there is no food on the table, men open the door"* (Dupree 1989: 7).

The *Pushtoonwali* is not a homogeneous and consistent cultural system, it contains inherent dilemmas and contradictions, interpretations and choices which must be understood in specific contexts.[11] The war, and now the Taliban, have molded and influenced the cultural and social structures of Afghan Pushtoons.

3. Research Methods

All the interviews have been carried out by Dr. Yasmin Hamidi and her Community Development Officers (CDO) Parween and Farahnaz. Research was commenced in Surkhab and Saranan, two refugee villages. Both of these communities have known Dr. Yasmin for over a year and have developed a relationship of trust with her, due to her work as Mother and Child Health (MCH) advisor and community development coordinator for the area. In Surkhab she had an interview guideline, a list of open ended questions of interest to MCI and its donors. After the initial analysis of the data from Surkhab it was decided that the format of the interview needed precision. The initial question format was in parts ambiguous and encouraged yes/no answers rather than description. For further research in refugee villages and project areas in Afghanistan, the interview questions were altered to facilitate the gathering of information and to increase the amount of data

[9] In Islam sexuality is perceived as the energy of instincts. These instincts in themselves are not divided into bad or good. What is crucial, is how these instincts are used. Laws formed to maintain social order determine the context in which the use of instincts is either right or wrong. It is unnecessary for an individual to control sexual desire for the sake of control, instead, it is to be used according to the requirements of religious law. Sexuality is for procreation and as such is permissible only within marriage. Here it serves the purpose of the Muslim order. Illicit intercourse will destroy this order. (Mernissi 1987: 27-30.) Female dress and mobility are tied to perceptions of female sexuality.

[10] Male line of family.

[11] One of the contradictions is between Islam and *Pushtoonwali*. Usually in tribal and rural areas it is *Pushtoonwali* which wins, among the educated and urban population it is Islam. (Boesen 1983, Donnan 1988: 87-110.) One good illustration is that of marriage systems. Brideprice is the form of marital payment used among the Pushtoon while Islam prescribes a system of dowry and *mehr,* divorce compensation. Most urban, wealthy and educated Pushtoon families have dowry and not brideprice.

from the women interviewed. The new interview format is semi-structured, the questions open ended. It has been designed to gather information on female access to education and health care, income generating activities, training, sources of information and repatriation. For women in refugee villages the questions focus on their perceptions of the current situation in Afghanistan and their sources of information. Comparative data on the present situation, before the war and during the war has been obtained by recording women's life history narratives. Both interview formats can be found in Annex I.

In Afghanistan Dr. Yasmin and her CDO, clad in *burqas*[12], were driven to the central bazaar of a research area. They then moved on foot from one compound to the next to do interviews. Compounds were generally chosen at random in each area of town or different parts of the village and district. In Lashkargah three women recommended households that should be interviewed. Two women interviewed were relatives. For interviews in more remote areas of the town, village or district they were taken by car. In Hazarjuft researchers used a vehicle between compounds more frequently because the Talib *Wulluswal*, the district commissioner, was in the town. Two female strangers walking on their own may have created a problem had they been stopped by the entourage of the *Wulluswal*.

One group interview in Saranan was carried out at the Basic Health Unit (BHU), the rest in the homes of women. All other interviews in Baluchistan and Afghanistan were carried out in homes of women or the compound of a friend or neighbour. The monthly meeting of Health Committee members in Surkhab was also used in this research to gather feedback from women. The Social Development Advisor was present at this meeting and visits to the Basic Health Units and compounds in the refugee villages.

All interviews were carried out and written up in Pushto or Farsi. They were translated and typed in English for analysis purposes in Quetta.

4. Research Areas

The research was carried out in Helmand province of Afghanistan and three refugee villages in Baluchistan, Pakistan. In Afghanistan interviews were carried out in the capital of Helmand province, Lashkargah City, and three districts within Helmand: Hazarjuft (also known as Darweshan), Nad-i-Ali and Grishk. The refugee villages in Baluchistan were Surkhab, Saranan and Pir Alizei. (See Annex II)

"Lashkargah was little America, how it is like a graveyard." (Eqlima, Las 8)

Before the war Lashkargah City was called "little America" due to the large North American community who were there to develop infrastructure: roads and irrigation canals. The town with its residential areas, hospitals, cinema and other 'modern' services was built by the Americans in the 50s and 60s. Later it was inhabited by an increasing

[12] The *burqa* is a shuttlecock shaped garment which reaches the ankles and has only a small embroidered screen in front of the eyes to see out of. A more modern version of the *burqa* has two chiffon veils to cover the face and is worn with a long black coat.

number of Afghans from all over the country and suffered destruction during the years of fighting. One Kandahari pilot remembers Lashkargah as everyone's favoured place to be posted.

Hazarjuft is situated along the Helmand river. The Darweshan canal runs through the area. In the 1950s landless families from the north, east and central areas of the country were brought there and each given 30 jeribs[13] of land to cultivate. Due to this, the population of Hazarjuft is made up of many different ethnic groups and Pushtoon tribes. The four predominant Pushtoon tribes in the area are the Alizai, Nurzai, Achzakzai and Pupalzai. Different ethnic groups include Hazaras, Tajiks and Uzbeks. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in the area. Due to the dryness of the area many families are engaged in livestock production. The Hazarjuft bridge, which has been rehabilitated by MCI, has re-opened the southern trade and access route between Iran and Pakistan. This was acknowledged by the interviewees in Hazarjuft.

Grishk is the largest town in which research was carried out. The central town is on the Kandahar Herat road along the Boghra canal. Villages spread across both sides of the canal. Due to the 75 km Boghra canal, numerous streams and the closeness of the Helmand river, Grishk is ideal for agriculture and has thus drawn people from many areas of the country. The population of Grishk is made up of Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras and many Pushtoon tribes: Alizai, Nurzai, Achzakzai, Muhammadzai, Pupalzai, Barekzai, Alkozai, Kharut, Diftani and Suleman Kheil. Though not a majority the Muhammadzai, the kings tribe, have the most influence and power in the area as they own the most land.

Nad-i-Ali a district along the Lashkargah Grishk road, about 40 km from Lashkargah City, also benefits from the Boghra canal. Its main source of livelihood is agriculture. The central town has a small bazaar of approximately 150 shops. Small villages spread out on both sides of the road. The population of this district is also ethnically diverse due to the migration to the area of many landless families from the north.

The three refugee villages in Baluchistan, where research was carried out, are Saranan, Surkhab and Pir Alizei. All three villages started off as refugee camps but with time, the Afghans have built houses and the camps have become permanent settlements and are now called refugee villages.

Saranan and Pir Alizei are both situated in very dry and flat areas. The Saranan camp is divided into two: Old and New Saranan. Surkhab is larger than the other two camps and spread out across a dry river bed in a valley. All the refugee village houses are made from mud and blend into the surroundings, except in Surkhab where green gardens and orchards break the monotonous browns. Some areas in all villages are predominantly comprised of ruins of old houses from which people have repatriated.

The inhabitants of Saranan are predominantly from Northern Afghanistan while those of Surkhab are from the Kandahar area and other provinces of the south. Pir Alizei has

[13] One jerib of land is 0.2 hectares.

refugees from Kandahar and Helmand provinces and a few families from the northern areas of Afghanistan.

These refugee villages receive little help from the Pakistan government. The Project Directorate Health (PDH), a government agency, works together with UNHCR and MCI in these villages in the areas of health care and community development. Save the Children (US) is involved in education and Group Guaranteed Loans and Savings (GGLS).

5. Groups of Study

The total number of women interviewed during this research was 98. Of these interviews 55 were carried out in the refugee villages in Baluchistan and 43 in Afghanistan. These figures do not include the female health committee members of refugee villages who, during their monthly meetings, contributed information for this report or those many women who commented on what interviewees were saying while being interviewed.

25 women were interviewed in Saranan. Five group interviews and eight individual interviews were carried out. Both in Surkhab and Pir Alizei 15 women were interviewed individually but other women around the household also commented on what was being said. One interview in Pir Alizei was a group interview.

In Afghanistan 16 women were interviewed in Hazarjuft and 16 in Grishk, three in Nad-i-Ali and eight in Lashkargah City. Between 6-8 women, who were visiting or who live in the same compound as the interviewee, were present at each interview and commented upon and elaborated on what the woman being interviewed said. Thus, in reality the 43 interviews that were carried out represent the views of more than these 43 women.

In Hazarjuft all the women interviewed were Pushtoons, aged between 15 and 95. Of the 16 women nine are returnees from Pakistan. In Grishk four of the 16 women interviewed were Farsi speakers,[14] the rest were Pushtoons. Three of the women were Shia, the rest Sunni Muslims. The women were aged between 18 and 65. In Lashkargah City two Pushtoons and six Farsi speakers were interviewed. Two of the women were Shias, one was Tajik. The youngest woman interviewed was 25 and the oldest 70 years old. In Nad-i-Ali three Pushtoon women were interviewed. Two of them were 38 years old and one was 70 years old. (Annex III for details of interviewees.)

6. Discourses of the Veil

With the exception of north Afghanistan, previous government authorities, not only the Taliban, have imposed some form of dress code on women and limitations on female movement. This is not a new phenomenon. The roots for this can be found in colonial history.

[14] All non-Pushtoons are referred to as Farsi speakers by the women interviewed. This means that Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras, for instance, are considered Farsi speakers though they have their own indigenous languages.

The veil is, and has been for more than a century, a potent signifier of the social meaning of gender that influences political and cultural issues. The great social transformation and new ideological developments that resulted from European colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the colonies set the economic and political parametres for change. As a result of this impact, Muslim women in the Middle East and South Asia found themselves for the first time as the central subject for national debate. The new discourse, which first emerged in Egypt, instead of displacing old religious gender ideology, linked issues concerning women with nationalism, national development and cultural change. As a result of this discourse it was unrealistically stated that to improve women's status in the colonies, the "innate" and "irreparable" misogynist practices of the native culture needed to be abandoned for European customs and beliefs. In crude terms this meant replacing Islamic-style dominance for western-style male dominance. (Ahmed 1992: 127-129.) Or as Nair (1992: 30) puts it, create *"western style order out of eastern style chaos".*

Islam became linked to the oppression of women. The use of the veil and the segregation of the sexes proved this and were seen as the fundamental reasons for the backwardness of Islamic societies. It was implied that the only way a Muslim society could develop and become civilised was for these practices to be abolished. Thus, the veil became the symbol of the oppression of women and of the backwardness of Islam. Subsequently, as the colonial narrative on women and Islam entered the mainstream Arabic discourse, the veil became a symbol of resistance to Western domination and a moral liberal society, best known in the cases of Algeria, the revolution in Iran and most recently in Afghanistan. In the resistance narrative the veil symbolises the dignity and validity of all 'native' practices, particularly those that came under attack during a previous regime or outside influence. These practices are those relating to women. Thus, the west gave rise to the creation of the veil as a symbol of resistance by creating meanings for the veil to begin with. The veil as a symbol of resistance is the western narrative on women and Islam reversed. (Ahmed 1992: 162-164.)

The Taliban, as many powers before them, link women's seclusion and segregation to nationalism, national development and cultural change. It should be noted that the requirements of the Taliban regarding female dress and mobility vary, depending on the geographical area in question, whether it is a rural or urban area (Le Duc and Sabri 1996: 19-22). In the predominantly Pushtoon and Talib south it is demanded that women wear the *burqa*, a garment that is customarily worn by the majority of women in the area. In Herat, for example, the Taliban demand that women be covered from head to toe but women are left to the choice as to how to achieve this. In Jalalabad in 1996 women were asked to wear either a *chadar* , a large shawl, or *hijab*, a long coat and head scarf.

6.1. The Mobility and Visibility of Women

Female mobility varies among the women interviewed. The size of the village or town, where one is going and the age of the woman affect female mobility in Afghanistan. Most women begin 'to do *purdah*' and wear the *burqa* when they marry. However, Seema (Las 2) said that she began wearing the *burqa* after the Muhajeddin came into power. She had worn only the *chadar* prior to this.

With the exception of some tribal Pushtoon groups, with very strict *purdah* observances (Grima 1993), a family 'traditionally' practices *purdah* only if its members can afford to do so. Women in the rural areas are rarely able to adhere to complete *purdah*, for their labour is needed to provide daily subsistence. While the *burqa* was rarely worn by higher class women before the war or before the Taliban, it was a status symbol for many of the poorer classes, proving that they can afford seclusion. For women who cannot afford to confine themselves like higher class women, the *burqa* and *chadar* become sought after goals and external signs of respectability. In towns and cities veiling is not disregarded but it is more lax due to the greater anonymity that city life provides. (Mandelbaum 1988: 41-42, 86; Mumtaz et al. 1987: 29-30.)

In Lashkargah City restrictions on women's mobility and visibility began with the Muhajeddin in 1992. Women had enjoyed relative freedoms prior to this. Under the Taliban, women in Lashkargah are not allowed to shop alone because this involves contact with shopkeepers: men. If women go shopping they have to stand away from the shop in the street while their husband brings them the merchandise for their approval.

"We are allowed to go out everywhere but only old women can do shopping. Other than that it is no problem to go out. It's not possible to go to the fields here but in the villages it is possible. I go to relatives houses, neighbours." (Bibigul, Las 1)

"I or we, are allowed to go out of the compound anywhere in our city, but we can't do shopping. In the city when we visit friends or relatives houses it is no problem. It is not necessary to have male company. If we travel to another city or village we have to be with a male." (Bibi Gouhar, Las 3)

In Nad-i-Ali restrictions on shopping precede the enforcement by the Taliban. Shoogufa explains:

"I'm only allowed to visit neighbours, not shop. It is a very small village so women are not going shopping. It is not only because of the Taliban but also because of our culture" (Nad 1)

In Hazarjuft the restriction on women shopping is not as absolute but women feel it is better to refrain from it.

"I'm allowed to go to others' houses. Only shopping is difficult. Some of the Taliban are kind but some are very serious, so better not go." (Hazrata, Haz 10)

"I'm allowed to go out of the home, for shopping it is sometimes difficult. The Taliban don't allow us but some of them are good. ... When I was young I could not go alone, because I could not find the way ... also in our culture it was bad if young women went out. It is easy for me now." (Gulaba, Haz 3)

For some women like Khadija the restrictions on shopping have made little impact.

"Life is easier than before the Taliban, only women can't do shopping alone. But I never went shopping. My husband or others have always brought me the things I want because I felt scared. Before we used the burqa too and now also. It is not because of the situation. We do this because of our culture and tradition". (Haz 1)

MERCY CORPS
INTERNATIONAL

'Eat What you Want, Dress the Way Your Community Wants'

The Position of Afghan Women in MCI Programme Areas

Anna M. Pont
Social Development Advisor
May 1998

Abstract

This is a report on the position of Afghan women in MCI programme areas. It is based on qualitative research carried out in three communities in Helmand Province of Afghanistan and three refugee villages in Baluchistan, Pakistan. The research focuses on women's mobility, female activities, income generation, training, repatriation, sources of information and access to education and health care.

The aim of this research is to open discursive spaces for the narratives of Afghan women. To involve women in development, and to mainstream gender concerns in assistance efforts in Afghanistan, there is a need for local female interpretations of the impacts of the current situation on their lives.

Women have to negotiate their position within familial, cultural and political spheres. Family influence continues to be important in determining issues concerning mobility, education and access to health care. This report discusses Pushtoon cultural practices, seclusion and discourses of the veil. Moving beyond the social value system is difficult for women in a community where family and male honour is tied to women's behaviour. Therefore, the position of many rural women under the restrictions of the Taliban, has changed little.

*The title of this report is a Pushtoon saying.

Table of Contents

Page Number

Prologue

1. Introduction 1

2. Pushtoonwali and Purdah 2

3. Research Methods 4

4. Research Areas 5

5. Groups of Study 7

6. Discourses of the Veil 7

6.1. The Mobility and Visibility of Women 8

7. Women's Activities 11

8. Women's Access to Health Care 12

9. Women's Access to Education 13

10. Income Generating Activities 16

11. Training 17

12. Women's Sources of Information 17

13. Repatriation 18

13. Conclusions 19

Bibliography 22

Annexes

I Interview Formats 24
II Map of Research Areas 31
III Details of Interviewees in Afghanistan 33
IV Goods Produced, Sold and Exchanged in Helmand Province 37

*   *   *

Please interview me , I know how to speak. Don't look at me and think that because I am uneducated I don't know anything.

I was born in Hazarjuft, then brought up in Pakistan: Ligi Karez refugee village. Last year we returned home. I was too young when we became refugees to remember what my native land was like. I always kept asking my grandmother what Afghanistan looked like and why we were in Pakistan. She ignored me many times, so I cried. One day my grandmother went to hospital. When she came back to the compound she was tired and the weather was very hot. She asked me for water. Then she started to say something and tears came out of her eyes. She said, "I want to go back to Hazarjuft." Then she told me about my native land. I was eagerly waiting to come home.

Finally last year we returned but things are very different here. Nice climate, we have water here but there is not enough water and it is not clean. I want to be educated but in Pakistan we did not have girl schools because some of the men did not want them. One day they made a school for girls but it was far from my compound so my father did not allow me to go. Here my uncle is Talib. He says women should not go to school. What should I do? I want to be like you one day. Now we have chickens, goats and we had rabbits. Now I have only two. I play with them all day. Please pray for me to get education and one day be a famous woman.

Lawangina
15 years old, Hazarjuft

*   *   *